# BALLET TODAY

VOL. I. No. 3 NOVEMBER, 1946

A MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO BALLET EVERYWHERE
NEWS FROM AMERICA, RUSSIA & ITALY

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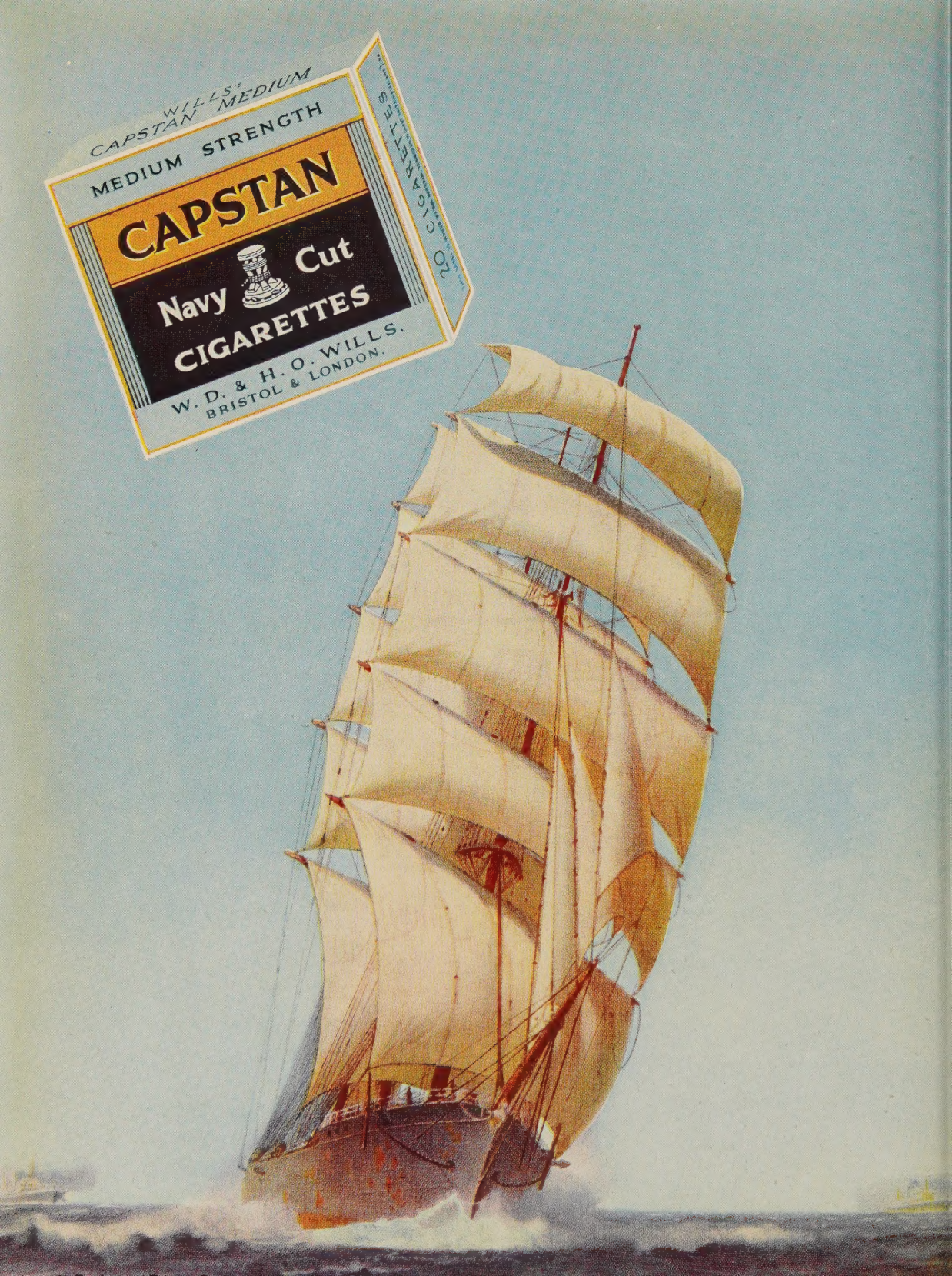
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BALLET TODAY

Vol. I. No. 3 November, 1946

*Editorial Offices* - 244 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON W.C.1
Telephone: Chancery 8471

# EDITORIAL COMMENT

THE principal event of the autumn season of the Sadler's Wells Ballet at Covent Garden will be the *première* of the new Ashton-Beaton-Berners ballet, *Les Sirènes*, on November 12th. The action takes place at Trouville in the year 1904 and is in keeping with a Ouida-esque conception of that fashionable watering place at that time. The audience is in for some surprises, and altogether it looks as if *Les Sirènes* may fill for Covent Garden the place *A Wedding Bouquet* had during the Company's days at Sadler's Wells. Margot Fonteyn will be a mysterious Spanish dancer, La Bolero (to be doubled by Violetta Prokhorova—an interesting experiment this), Robert Helpmann will appear as an Italian tenor, which should be enormous fun for everybody, and Beryl Grey and Moira Shearer share the role of the Countess Kitty, with Michael Somes as their yachtsman swain.

It is too late to resurrect now the wreck of the season of the New Monte Carlo Company which began with such advance fanfares but did not prove at all to the taste of London audiences, who, perhaps, had preconceived notions of what might be expected from a French company after the visit of Les Ballets des Champs Elysées, and were proportionately the more disappointed. *Dramma per Musica* remained the only Lifar ballet one would willingly sit through more than once, and his own appearances proved a sad mistake, most of all for those who remembered him in all the splendour of his youthful promise. The company contained a number of exceptionally strong dancers, but the choreography in the main was as arduous as it was unrewarding, and one shuddered in sympathy for the dancers' feet. Alexandre Kalioujny is the type of Russian character dancer that a Diaghilev might develop into another Bolm or Woizikovsky. The treasure of the season, however, was Yvette Chauviré, truly a *prima ballerina*, and on page 10 *Ballet Today* pays her a small tribute of appreciation with photographs of her in three of her finest roles.

Les Ballets des Champs Elysées have been touring over here since the middle of September. They are at Oxford the week commencing November 4th, and Birmingham the week of November 11th. Subject to correction, I believe this is the first time any company from abroad have made an extended tour of our provincial towns (naturally, I am excepting Pavlova and her company). Now that our English companies have created an interest in ballet in all parts of the country, it becomes increasingly important that other towns should have the same opportunities as London for acquiring an international outlook which is the only way to appreciate the best from all countries—our own or any other. Economic conditions make such tours an extremely difficult proposition, but I heartily wish there may be a solution to this problem for the sake of those thousands of ballet lovers who must long to do more than read about companies they have no chance of seeing. It must be confessed that the Champs Elysées Ballet have not always been shown to best advantage in theatres rather too large for their present size and strength and before audiences who were at first somewhat bewildered by so different an approach, but it has been good to find how touched and impressed audiences everywhere have been by *Les Forains*. Solange Schwarz has left, and in her place is Nina Vyroubova, a young dancer with superb legs, real classical style and a charming personality. Jean Babilée, while confirming the view that he is a great dancer in a way that was better understood twenty or even ten years ago than it is today, seems to find it difficult to adjust himself to conditions which are not always quite to his liking. This is unfair both to himself and to his audiences.

P.W.M.

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## *Pit-Boy at the Ballet*

*He had not known such splendour—could not quite*
*Believe in Fairyland . . . until tonight;*
*For fairies seldom walk on wooden feet*
*The cold grey cobbles of a mining street—*
*Now, like a welling sea, the wonder came,*
*Setting his world afire, his eyes aflame!*
*Sad eyes drink deep, that loveliness may hold*
*Beyond this moment; Let the curtain-fold*
*Be silken silence on a world apart—*
*Beauty a shield to hold against his heart.*
*The lips that war had cruelly turned to stone*
*Grew young again—lost laughter he had known*
*Stole sweetly to erase the lines of pain*
*Too early drawn . . . and he was Boy again.*
*—And this was Fairyland, where Beauty's spell*
*Might drowse the bad away—O hold the shell*
*Close to his ear! Let the brave music play*
*Ghost voices out, that cry and cry . . . The Day*
*May not come yet . . . Not yet the sad Dawn break,*
*Where Worlds are sick . . . and Youth afraid to wake!*

Noël H. Matthews.

SALLY GILMOUR AND GERARD MULYS IN "GISELLE", ACT

# BALLET RAMBERT, 1946

*By* MARY CLARKE

*Action photographs by Peggy Delius*

LEAVING behind the histories and appreciations that so deservedly marked the twentieth anniversary of Ballet Rambert—the chronicling of events which are treasured memories to so many, legends to even more—it comes as perhaps the most encouraging reflection of all to consider Ballet Rambert *today*. It is one of the few companies where the best does not necessarily lie behind, for the spirit which animated the earliest performances is as active today. Integrity is unsullied; knowledge has increased; and there has never been the slightest tendency to be swayed, let alone ruled, by popular taste. This policy may not have brought Madame Rambert great tangible rewards, but it has brought her rewards which she may value the more.

The present Hammersmith and recent Sadler's Wells seasons have brought Ballet Rambert before the great London audience that it deserves, and the emphatic success suggests that perhaps the public is now ready to receive a repertoire of which it was once largely unaware and to appreciate the important place that the Rambert choreographers occupy in the present as well as the past history of English Ballet.

It has become almost a platitude that in writing of a Rambert season one writes of new productions and new artists. The two London seasons produced two entirely new ballets by Walter Gore, a revival of the complete *Giselle*, and a new dancer, John Gilpin.

Taking first things first, Walter Gore's *Mr. Punch* can best be described as an English *Petrouchka*. In every respect it is smaller and it obviously is not destined to become the imperishable and international classic that *Petrouchka* became, but it does have merits that should ensure it a valued place in the Rambert repertoire

SONIA AROVA, JOAN MCCLELLAND AND SALLY GILMOUR IN "GALA PERFORMANCE"

for a long time yet. The traditional story of Mr. Punch's endearing wickedness is presented in five short scenes, during which the grotesque humour is fully exploited and is heightened by an occasional deft touch of real pathos. The plot naturally owes its inspiration—as does Ronald Wilson's gay décor—to the traditional puppet show, but Gore has created a real *ballet* from the familiar characters and not merely produced a straight copy with dancers pretending to be puppets. His own study of Mr. Punch holds the entire work together (and relieves it from occasional tedium) by an extraordinarily subtle and professional performance.

The first London performance of *Giselle*, on July 11th, will deserve a special mention in the future annals of the company as being the most ambitious production ever undertaken and as being one of the most satisfying productions of this ballet that we are likely to see. All that loving attention to period atmosphere and to Mr. Beaumont's researches could do, has been done. One receives the impression that not only the designer, Hugh Stevenson, and Madame Rambert herself, but the entire company has imbibed something of the spirits of the Romantic Age dancers who haunt, in lithographs, the walls of the Mercury Theatre. Stevenson achieves a beautiful contrast between the glowing autumnal colours of his first act and the chill, dark forest of the second. For the first time in years we see peasants who look like peasants and who are not all dressed identically, and a Duke who really is only a duke of a small German state and not dressed to put Henry VIII on the Field of the Cloth of Gold to shame. Some important aspects of the story are restored or made plain, for example, Giselle is crowned Queen of the Vintage, and the audience is given clear indication of Albrecht's disguise.

Sally Gilmour gives a most moving performance as Giselle, though she has not yet full technical mastery. Walter Gore now emerges as one of the best English Albrechts, while the interpretation of Gerard Mulys of the Monte Carlo Ballet (at the first performance, when a last-minute accident prevented Gore appearing) was remarkable for its nobility, sympathetic mime and fine dancing. Joyce Graeme's Queen of the Wilis, aided by good make-up and lighting, genuinely suggested an implacable spirit.

Every season since its inception Ballet Rambert has lost some seemingly irreplaceable artists to larger undertakings, but every season new blood is brought in and, if emphasis is shifted, the standard does not fall. Frank Staff and Elizabeth Schooling are undeniably missed, but Joyce Graeme and Brenda Hamlyn have

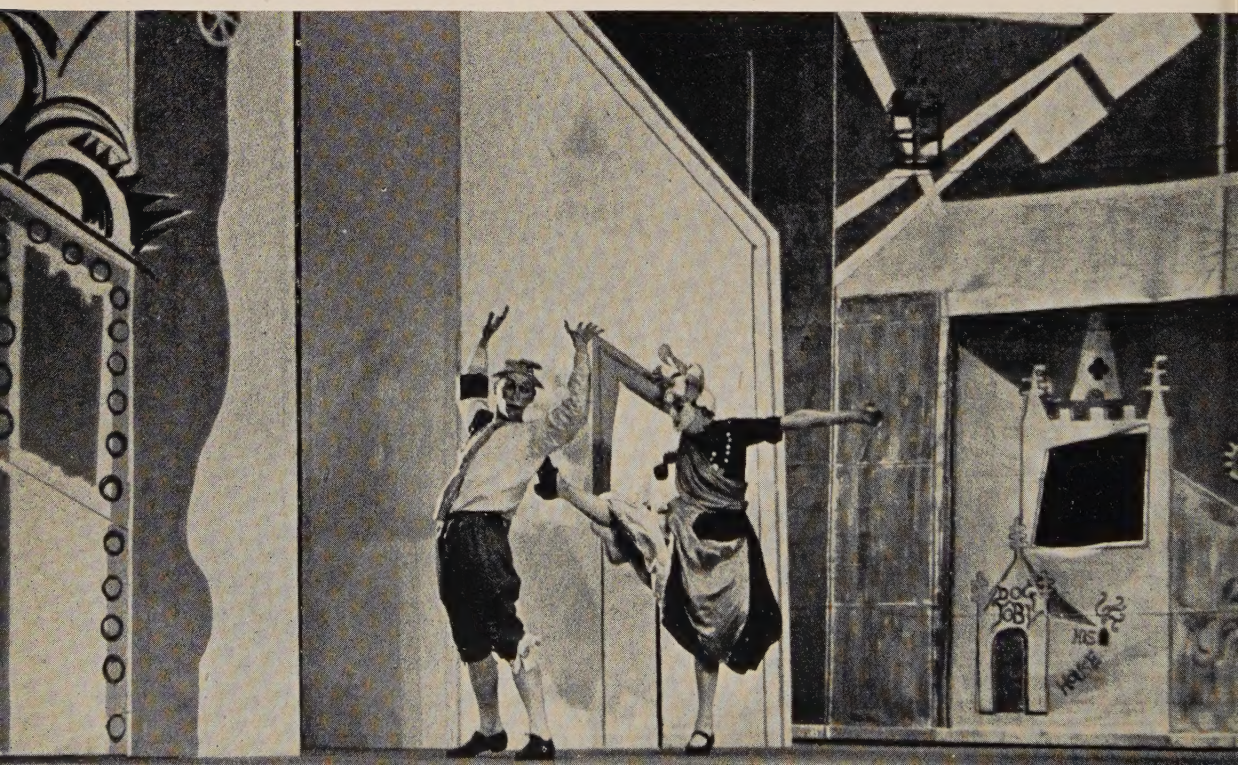
shown unexpected gifts of comedy, while Sally Gilmour achieves one of her most perfect characterisations (and that is saying a great deal) as the abysmally silly Ballerina from Paris in *Gala Performance*. Sonia Arova, dancing with the Ballet Rambert for the first time shows a new control and maturity, and will be remembered for her promising Swan Queen and adorable cat in *Peter and the Wolf*. Celia Franca, dancing as guest artist, has lent her special qualities to *Dark Elegies* and *L'Après Midi d'un Faune*.

With Gore back to strengthen the male team and with Stanley Newby emerging as a useful character dancer, the Hammersmith season shows a more balanced company than danced at the Wells. Little John Gilpin has promise that can escape no-one and shines like a beacon in the almost impenetrable gloom of English male dancing. He is fortunate in having appeared at a time when visits of foreign companies are again bringing great male dancers to this country—from study of whose performances both he and the audience may profit. William Chappell's guest appearances in *L'Après Midi d'un Faune* enabled the restoration to the repertoire of an example of Nijinsky's choreography, for which we are again indebted to Madame Rambert.

Ballet Rambert today is inevitably suffering from growing pains as it progresses from the Mercury to larger stages and replaces its two excellent pianists by a so far erratic orchestra. Some of the snares and rewards of enlarging chamber works were recently revealed by the Tudor ballets at Covent Garden. Humour seems to be the most elusive quality—Ballet Theatre's *Gala Performance* and Sadler's Wells *Facade* are warnings—but the almost unbearable tragedy of *Jardin aux Lilas* remains as poignant today as ever, and *The Planets* has perhaps never been lovelier, more utterly out of this world. *Capriol Suite* has suffered though, and can now only be saved by exceptionally gifted artists. *Lady into Fox*, too, is tending to grow out of its setting, although *Confessional*, which is little more than a solo for Sally Gilmour, has lost nothing of its tremendous impact; it is one of the most moving and emotionally shattering things to be seen in any theatre.

Ballet Rambert has an especial gift for moving and adult ballets—witness *The Fugitive*, *Death and the Maiden*, as well as the major Tudor works—but the company also excels in comedy: the grotesqueries of *Mr. Punch*, the sublety of *Gala Performance*, the spontaneity and wit of the delectable *Czernyana*. The news that Eve Swinstead-Smith, the artist responsible for *Czernyana*, is to design the décor for Walter Gore's *Concerto Burlesco*, a light ballet to Bartok music, due at Hammersmith, November 4th, gives promise of further delectation in the same *genre* to come.

WALTER GORE, WITH JOYCE GRAEME AS MRS. JUDY, IN "MR. PUNCH"



# TWO LETTERS FROM MOSCOW

## "CINDERELLA" AND OTHER NEW BALLETS

*By* ELENA ROSLAVLEVA

AN outstanding event of the past ballet season was Prokofiev's *Cinderella* to be surpassed only by *Romeo and Juliet* promised in late autumn at the Bolshoi.

As a musical composition Prokofiev's *Cinderella* is a work of exceptional significance which will unfailingly attract attention. It has ingenious fantasy typical of Prokofiev, interesting colour and orchestration. Unhappy, fragile little Cinderella's sufferings are excellently conveyed through the music. Prokofiev's ballet was interpreted by the Bolshoi Theatre as a grand pageant. Even the Moscow stage, accustomed to decorative splendour, has not seen such a bright festive show for a long time.

The choreographer, Rostislav Zakharov, and stage designer, Peter Williams (a celebrated Russian artist whose name is English because his family is of distant American extraction), produced a lively amusing picturesque ballet with all the fairy tale paraphernalia of pantomime.

Besides pleasing the eye with an abundance of colour, theatrical tricks and numerous dances, *Cinderella* as a ballet gave a chance to the individual dancers to demonstrate talent and technique. Olga Lepeshinskaya dances brilliantly and feels at home against the dazzling palatial background of the décor. Galina Ulanova seems to stare at the magnificence of the fairy world with widely opened eyes, and this interpretation of Cinderella's part is also quite in conformity with the tale. Lepeshinskaya and Ulanova have shown us two aspects of Cinderella, and we are grateful for both of them. The same applies to their partners Mikhail Gabovitch and Vladimir Preobrajensky. Prokofiev made his musical interpretation of the Prince energetic, galloping, vehement—quite unlike the languorous traditional princes of classical ballets. Gabovitch and Preobrajensky both showed brilliancy of technique, each adding something personal to the prince's character. Gabovitch made him more energetic and majestic, while Preobrajensky's prince is youthfully temperamental.

Victorina Krieger, an experienced character dancer of long standing, created an interesting grotesque figure of the stepmother, considerably modernising the traditional classical pantomime.

All the parts in the Moscow production of *Cinderella*, even seemingly secondary ones, are danced by first-class dancers. Thus, Asaf Messerer is the jester, Abramova is the fairy, Shmelkina and Lazarevitch the wicked sisters. The music, however, does not always provide sufficient scope for the dancing, and this makes the ballet uneven in some parts.

*Lady-Rustic*, a new ballet by Boris Asafiev, the choreography also by Rostislav Zakharov, was not such a hit of the season, being overshadowed by *Cinderella's* splendour. Indeed, it is a ballet with only six characters and the practical absence of a *corps de ballet* in the customary sense of the word. *Ensemble* and expressiveness, acting and dancing mattered most in this three-act ballet. In my opinion it is definitely a step on the way to the "dance of action" when there will be complete unity of music and dance. At any rate most of the dances in *Lady-Rustic* were composed by Zakharov with that idea, and he succeeded in replacing pantomime by dance. The music of the ballet is based on Russian folk songs, first sad and pensive, and then merry and wild. Russian peasant girls dance in circles to this music in the first act. Alexei Berestov, a young nobleman (the ballet takes place in the thirties of the nineteenth century) meets mischievous Liza Berestova, the daughter of a neighbouring landlord, with whom his father has an old feud, and falls in love with her. But she was dressed as a peasant girl and he loves her as such. They often meet in the woods and he teaches her the alphabet. Meanwhile their parents have made up and decided to seal the reunion by the marriage of their children. Liza is told by her father about the arrival of her prospective fiancé. When, however, Alexei Berestov comes rather unwillingly to Liza's house he finds her disguised as a prim and proper Miss Jackson, an English governess. Liza's father cannot make out what she is up to. The marriage might never have taken place: but Alexei Berestov comes unexpectedly another time and whom should he find in the garden but his charming beloved peasant girl dressed as a lady and weeping over his letter.

Liza's part is very well done by Marina Semyonova, who is always so majestically Russian in all her parts, and Olga Lepeshinskaya, who is more tomboyish. But the real gem of this ballet, particularly from the viewpoint of choreography, is the part of Nastia, Liza's maid and confidante. She dances nothing but the movements of a Russian folk dance, but each time tells a new story through the dancing. The part is excellently danced by two first-class soloists, Tatyana Lazarevitch and Zoya Korotayeva, who both portrayed the merry, temperamental Nastia, ready for any pranks

"CINDERELLA", WITH GALINA ULANOVA PARTNERED BY PREOBRAJENSKY

to please her young lady. The part of Alexei Berestov is done by the choreographer completely in the old tradition, and though Vladimir Preobrajensky gave it beautiful line the part remained uninteresting, while the parts of the two fathers were restricted solely to mime. Thus, this new ballet yet only traced a few lines showing what constitutes a dance of action.

The theatre named after Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovitch-Danchenko has a ballet company which experiments in one-act ballets. After Rimsky-Korsakov's *Schéhérazade* it produced Schumann's *Le Carnaval*. It has nothing to do however with Mikhail Fokine's production of romanticism—crinolines and peg-top trousers. Vladimir Burmeister, choreographer of this production, was justified in refusing to copy Fokine's *Le Carnaval*. Fokine had real people acting in an unreal manner. Burmeister interpreted the music, originally not intended for any histrionic impersonation, as a merry carnival with traditional masques of the *comedia dell'arte*. But his Columbine and Pierrot, and particularly Pantaloon love, all suffer as ordinary people would under the same circumstances. Since Schumann called his musical sketches *Carnival of Human Emotions*, Burmeister was also justified. Choreographically, however, this ballet is not one of his best creations. The greatest impression is left by Ivan Kurilov, versatile dancer who succeeded in making his Pantaloon deeply human, thus falling out of the masque pattern and dominating the whole ballet, probably much against the expectation of the choreographer.

For Moscow balletomanes a ballet is a new one when an old part is danced by a new ballerina. Thus 150-year-old *La Fille Mal Gardée* (*Vain Precautions*) saw a new dancer, Raisa Struchkova, just out of school. Already, in school, Struchkova attracted attention by her lyrical plastic qualities. One hoped she would make an excellent Giselle some day. The part of Liza in *Vain Precautions* is quite different, but Struchkova's charm and youth and grace added much to it, and she only proved her talent to be wider than expected. Maya Plisetskaya, who appeared in the title part of the technically very difficult *Raymonda*, proved to be almost quite mature. She is a scion of the great Messerer dancing family—namely she is Asaf Messerer's niece, and there is every reason to believe that another great dancer is growing in the Messerer clan.

## I VISIT THE BOLSHOI THEATRE AGAIN

*By* JACK CHEN

IT is part of the charming tradition of Moscow theatrical life, based on its repertory character, that one comes to love not only a successful play, but the players in their particular roles and the theatre itself. Moscow theatres are as familiar to their audiences

as their own homes. Old Vic fans will understand immediately what I mean. On entering the Bolshoi Theatre again, after an absence of nine years, I felt that I was going home to ballet. It was a familiar and well loved scene: the great portico dominating busy Sverdlov Square. The eager crowd trying to snatch up tickets at the last minute—for the house had been sold out days ahead; the crowded lobbies. I looked round for the accustomed faces of balletomanes of nine years back . . . but that was expecting too much.

Inside, all is as magnificent as ever. The roof and side walls are still covered with camouflage paint, but inside the glory is intact. Other buildings in Moscow that has been so sorely tried by war, may have their paint peeling off their walls and damp spots where unrepaired pipes are leaking, but my Bolshoi Theatre is shining like a ballerina in white marble with gold trimmings and rich red velvet and brocade embroideries. It is without a flaw. And inside every seat is filled. Just as it always used to be. There is no doubt that the enthusiasm, the excited appeals for tickets outside, heighten the sense of spectacle, of expectation.

The box was quickly filled. Two Frenchmen from the Embassy, two girl stenographers, two students, a very small man in workers' top boots, and a very small little girl in a sleeveless *sarafan*. The seat next to mine is taken by a stout fellow in a Russian blouse and a smooth shaven head.

I have been lucky enough to see two ballets on my short stay. The first was *Don Quixote*, based on Petipa's libretto, with choreography by Gorsky, but with new decorations by Rindin and new dances composed by Zakharov, one of the most successful of the young Soviet producers, and by Kasyan Goleizovsky, pupil of Fokine, and a temperamental genius, who has delighted everyone with his own sparkling version of the Spanish dance.

If I missed old friends in the audience I meet many of them again on the stage. Prima ballerina is Sulamif Messerer, sister of the second male dancer in the Union. I am astonished at her first entrance. Ten years ago she was being given her first big chances in leading roles in such ballets as *Bright Springs*, the Shostakovich Ballet that was withdrawn after being subjected to a storm of criticism. Frankly, we used to applaud Messerer more in the nature of encouragement than for her attainments—but now, she is brilliant. Her Dulcinea is faultless. I do not know how she will carry off a role that demands real dramatic ability, such as Giselle, but in this lively ballet she dances with an infectious confidence and verve that seems to inspire the whole company.

L. Laschilin, who was still dancing on my last visit, is now one of that honoured group of veteran artists who play the pantomimic roles of wicked old uncles and aunts, or gracious elderly kings. Plisetskaya as a dryad, Petrova as Dulcinea's friend, Vera Vasilieva dancing with all her accustomed grace and charm as the gypsy, create a brilliant supporting setting for Messerer. But most of the names of the *corps de ballet* are either new to me or I never noticed them before. This is by no means the best collective of the Bolshoi, but it is plain that if there is anything to surpass it—and that could only be in Leningrad—it must be truly phenomenal.

Just before I left London I saw our *Sleeping Beauty* at Covent Garden. The Sadler's Wells' presentation could bear comparison with any in richness, beauty and ingenuity of costuming and general production, but it cannot bear comparison with the extraordinarily high level of dance technique that I see here. That is—as yet, for I remember that nine years ago the Bolshoi Theatre collective had many of the faults that I noticed at Covent Garden, in particular the tendency of leading dancers to take liberties with technique, a tendency that in the *corps de ballet* reflects itself in ragged timing and movement. In this respect, in the old days, the Bolshoi compared to the more famous Leningrad company, much as Sadler's Wells compares today to the Bolshoi. But it is evident that hard work and strict rehearsing have borne splendid fruit. Today the Bolshoi Ballet has just those fine qualities that made the Leningrad Theatre so much admired.

In this improvement of course no small a share goes to the conducting of Faier, the leading dance conductor of the Soviet Union, who knows each ballet score, each ballet and dancer as a mother knows her children, and blends the music with dancer with perfect tact.

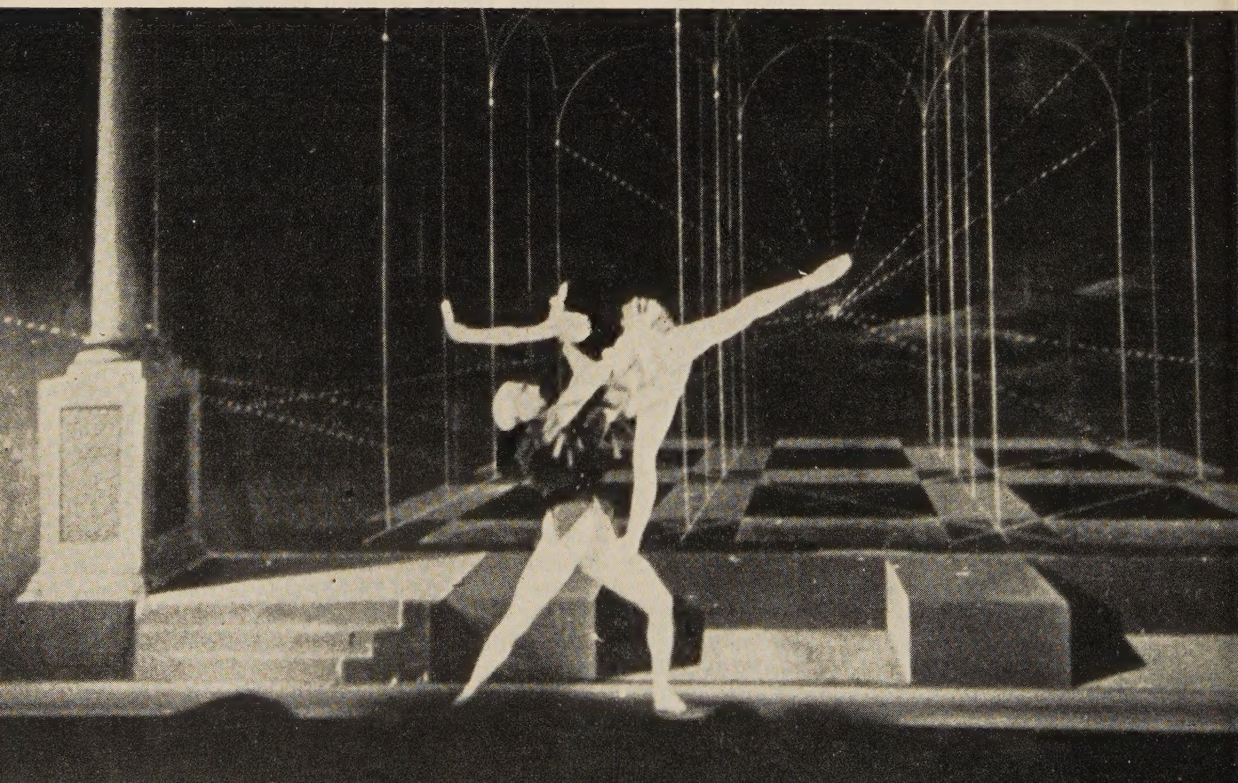
The brilliance of the dancing in the slight *Don Quixote* keyed up my expectations for the new *Cinderella* of Ulanova or Lepeshinskaya. But, unfortunately, I have to continue my journey, and I seize the chance of seeing at least *The Swan Lake* again. On that night the lead was taken by Bogolubskaya. She has a charming personality but she does not have the stamina necessary to carry the role through to the end. Tchaikovsky's dream remained incompletely fulfilled. Rudenko, too, is a grand looking prince and partner, his acting is full of dignity, but as a soloist he is outshone by the phenomenal turns and leaps of Khomyakov as the Clown. And a prince should be a prince in everything. But while we in the audience have perhaps missed the full drama and beauty of the ballet, we do not go away dissatisfied. We are a loyal audience. We have seen our old and beautiful friends again in roles we know and love. Staging, music, ensemble, have not failed to hold us entranced as evil is overcome and love triumphs again.

*Action photograph by Roger Wood*
"CHOTA ROUSTAVELI", WITH YOULY ALGAROFF

*Action photograph by Roger Wood*
"GISELLE", ACT I, WITH YOULY ALGAROFF

YVETTE CHAUVIRÉ, BALLERINA OF THE NEW MONTE CARLO BALLET COMPANY

"DRAMMA PER MUSICA", WITH ALEXANDRE KALIOUJNY *Action photograph by G. B. L. Wilson*



# NEWS FROM NEW YORK

*By* MURRAY N. FRIEDMAN

THE summer months are generally devoid of ballet news in New York. Almost nothing took place save what promises to be the annual appearance of a small Markova-Dolin troupe at the Lewisohn Stadium. Frankly, I think ballet is out of place in an amphitheatre the size of the Stadium, but an estimated 25,000 persons turned out to see the two recitals offered by the little company. Markova-Dolin apparently have the necessary box-office appeal to become regular features.

Apart from this brief interlude of dance, the ballet world has been agog with the discussion of plans for the fall.

As usual, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo had only the briefest season—two weeks, commencing September 4th, at the City Centre Theatre. Danilova pulled a tendon before the opening and was out for the New York season at least. The first night programme consisted of *Ballet Imperial*, *Baiser de la Fée*, *Bluebird* and *Rodeo*. *Ballet Imperial* in the classic style to Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto is one of my very favourite Balanchine works. The leads were Krassovska and Maria Tallchief (the new Mrs. Balanchine; they were married on August 16th). Both were excellent, with Tallchief dancing better than ever before. Marie-Jeanne danced Danilova's role in *Baiser de la Fée*. As anticipated, the last scene has been altered so that there is no longer the lengthy wait beforehand. The *Bluebird pas de deux* was danced very well by Ruthanna Boris and Danielian, but the *tempo* was much too rapid. It is a wonder the dancers were able to keep up with the music. *Rodeo*, with Franklin, Nora White, Nicolas Magellanes and Pauline Goddard, was about as usual; as American as apple pie, to use a trite phrase.

There was one *première*, Ruth Page's *The Bells*, with music by Darius Milhaud, and sets and costumes by Isamu Noguchi. This has been done before, but the *première* in New York was built up into an event. With Danilova ill, Ruth Page danced the young Bride, and Nikita Talin was the King of the Ghouls. Ruthanna Boris took over the feminine lead after the opening night. The reaction at the *première* was mixed, but the ballet is going much better now. Danilova is dancing it in Chicago and all may be well yet. Personally, I am unimpressed, but perhaps I will like it better with Danilova.

From Ruth Page's programme summary: "The ballet thus presents a cycle of life from happiness to obliteration, from illusion to disillusion. The action begins with the entrance of a girl dressed in bright ornaments, who performs a dance of youthful nonsense to the tinkle of the little silver bells. Putting on a wedding veil, she dances a happy duet with her bridegroom, accompanied by the mellow wedding bells, the golden bells. Soon the brazen bells sound an alarm which disturbs the happiness of the couple. In a solemn interlude the iron bells proclaim a discordant threatening message of futility and impending doom. The King of the Ghouls appears to dance a duet with the bridegroom, in which the young man, lured away from his bride, becomes victim of the decadence and depravity of a world going mad. As the bride sees her beloved taken away from her she covers herself with a dark veil of sorrow as if to shut out the violence and chaos which surround her. The curtain falls upon the complete triumph of the King of the Ghouls, whose destructive power is epitomised by the collapse into ruin of the church, the symbol of truth and morality. Only the sad beauty of death and disintegration remains".

YUREK SHABELEVSKY AND BETTINA ROSAY REHEARSING FOR BALLET FOR AMERICA

*Photograph by Otto F. Hess*

After an absence of several years, Yurek Shabelevsky has returned to the American scene. This fine character dancer, whom English audiences will remember for his brilliant work in *Petrouchka*, *Schéhérazade* and *Prince Igor* is founding a company of his own. Some months ago he arrived in New York and spoke to several dancers about the possibilities of a small company to be operated on a co-operative basis. Each dancer would have to be of soloist calibre. A more or less set programme would be worked out and the group would give a series of one-night recitals in various cities of the country. It was not planned to appear in New York during the first season. A promising group has been assembled and will go by the name of Ballet for America.

Heading the roster of female artists is Nana Gollner. She is definitely a star of the first magnitude. Sharing top honours is Kathryn Lee, a virtuoso from Texas, who has been devoting most of her time to musical comedy. She has a phenomenal technique. I have seen her do a hundred perfect *fouettés* finishing up with a double or a triple, and her double turns in the air leave one breathless. Her artistry, however, is an unknown quantity. Most critics seem to feel that the discipline of a company will be the right thing for her. Then there are Tatiana Grantzeva, Bettina Rosay, *protegée* of Markova and a fine dancer in her own right, Galina Razoumova and Virginia Barnes. Among the men we find Yurek Shabelevsky, Yurek Lazovsky (co-artistic director with Shabelevsky), Paul Petroff, James Lyons and Shaun O'Brien.

Massine is reviving for them his 1925 Diaghilev ballet, *Les Matelots*. He will also contribute one of the ballets he did for his own group last year, *Strange Sarabande*, a composition inspired by the Breughel painting, "The Blind", with music by Handel. He is also doing a new ballet for them (his only one for an American company this year), called *Les Arabesques*, to the Beethoven "Archduke" trio. There will also be new ballets or revivals from Ruth Page, Shabelevsky, Lazovsky, and Boris Romanoff.

# ORIGINAL BALLET RUSSE AND BALLET THEATRE OPENINGS

*By* EDWIN DENBY

THE current exceptionally full New York ballet season has not yet shown any exceptional lustre. One might have hoped to see it as a lively competition between a pre-war and a post-war style of dancing, as represented the first by the Original Ballet Russe of Col. de Basil, and the second by Ballet Theatre. Instead, it has taken on the gloomy appearance of a war of attrition between Ballet Theatre and S. Hurok, the impresario. Sadly enough, the return of the Original after five years' absence has proved an event of no interest at all.

When Mr. Hurok and Ballet Theatre split last spring over differences of artistic policy, he booked the Original in Ballet Theatre's place. For twenty-two weeks this fall and winter the Original replaces Ballet Theatre, first at the Metropolitan Opera House here and later at many of the large and profitable theatres in other cities. The Original, to be sure, following a previous split with Mr. Hurok, had lost its most celebrated dancers and had had to spend five years arduously touring Latin America. But for its return Mr. Hurok added to it dancers such as Markova, Dolin, Eglevsky, Rosella Hightower, Skibine, Frank Moncion, and excellent young Marjorie Tallchief. To the de Basil repertory of standard classics, early Fokine and several pre-war successes, he added three American choreographies—Dollar's *Constantia*, Cobos's *Mute Wife*, and Caton's *Sebastian* (all three from the Marques de Cuevas' short-lived Ballet International), as well as *Giselle* and Dolin's *Pas de Quatre*. Even a good orchestra was engaged. And when the boat bringing the company from South America was delayed, local dancers were engaged to rehearse the American ballets as well as a New York *première*, *Camille*, and to dance in them till the Original had time to learn the new roles and take over. All in all, a very considerable and expensive effort; but the secret flaw in this plan was the five lean years the Original had been through since it was last seen here. They could not be patched over in a hurry.

The Original arrived September 27th and opened at the Metropolitan September 29th for a three and half week season. Ballet Theatre arrived a few days earlier and opened September 30th for a five week season at the Broadway Theatre. Both openings were crowded and demonstrative; the Original had the dressier, and Ballet Theatre the livelier crowd. But by the third night the weather prophets were foreseeing that by next fall Ballet Theatre would be back at the Metropolitan, and that faced with their respective deficits, Ballet Theatre and Mr. Hurok would soon find themselves in overwhelming artistic agreement.

People go to the Original out of curiosity and because it appears at the Metropolitan; but, despite the extra attractions they find the troupe as a whole

depressingly second rate. Ballet Theatre, on the other hand, has not the money either for the bold new productions or for the enlargement of the company that it needs to keep its spirit and its vitality at their best. It is, of course, clearly much the better ballet.

The best part of the Original's season so far has been the individual work of the dancers newly added to it—notably Markova and Eglevsky. But such isolated moments of brilliance do not blend with the rest, and the American dancers already look uncomfortable. The general style of the Original is very different from the accurate, large and buoyant American style. It is a survival, though only a faint one, of the pre-war Franco-Russian style with its dramatic sweep of phrase and its keen edge of temperament. In clarity, speed, line and bearing, however, the dancers are now too weak to give their dramatic intentions brilliance. One admires their instinct for colouring their dancing according to their roles—an instinct Americans are weak in. But their dancing too often is rudely forced and approximate, their stage presence emptily emphatic. The principals, such as Stepanova, Moulin, Stroganova, or, among the men, Toupine, Dokoudovsky, are dancers of obvious talent one would like to see after six months of intensive class work. Only Jasinsky in character mime roles shows a fine dignity and style, and watching the company as a whole one can well believe the story that they have not had a class for four years. One does not feel like criticising them in their misfortune. That these young people, many of them Latin Americans, have kept on dancing any kind of ballet with the touring conditions they have been under so long is touching to every ballet lover.

As for pre-war successes, so far, I have seen Fokine's *Paganini* and Lichine's *Francesca da Rimini*. The latter looked too foolish to be worth keeping; the former, for all its simple and large-scale amplitude of rhythmic continuity, was hard to take in its complacent mawkishness of sentiment.

The novelties of the Original's season are Taras's *Camille*, Lichine's *Cain and Abel* and Psota's *Yara*. *Camille*, Taras's second ballet, is set to a Rieti arrangement of Schubert piano pieces, and is dressed and decorated by Cecil Beaton. It shows us Marguerite Gautier, in her last illness, haunted first by the memory of a ball at which Armand appears, later by the vision of a happy afternoon spent with him in the country, and recurrently by the figure of his father; recalling her promise to the father, she awakens and sinks back in despair. The dances are gently inventive, clear, and fluent; they are also too lightly tinted and too innocently reticent to seem suitable to so passionate a subject or make much of a ballet. In addition, the dancing was smothered under the opulent elegance of Beaton's crinolines and decorative graces. Markova danced Camille with enchanting delicacy and clarity; Dolin as Armand was wooden and his costume gave him a hump.

Lichine's *Cain and Abel* has a score of Wagner excerpts and a décor by the Mexican Prieto of big snaky boulders, from the top of one of which Cain pushed his brother—a six-foot headlong drop on to a concealed mattress. *Cain and Abel* is an athletic romp for two muscular boys in bathing trunks, sometimes together, sometimes intertwined with two slightly dressed girls representing Good and Evil. There is a good deal of rolling, squirming and bumping on the floor and on rocks. It is a Hollywood conception of Biblical tragedy, and a ballet wit described it accurately as "Tarzan in a Turkish Bath". Cain and Abel beat their chests, yodel for an echo, and when the characters dance they look as awkward and as simple-minded as devotees of the Body Beautiful improvising Creative Expression on a beach. *Cain and Abel* is too simple-minded to get angry at; as a ballet it must be one of the most fantastic absurdities ever offered.

The opening night of Ballet Theatre began with a brilliant performance of *Interplay* and ended with a tired one of *Fancy Free*. In between, Nora Kaye had danced *Pillar of Fire* as beautifully as ever, and Alonso and Youskewitch had danced the *Swan Lake*, Act 3, *pas de deux*. Youskewitch is currently replacing Eglevsky as Ballet Theatre's classic *premier danseur*, and this was his first appearance since his return from the Navy. That evening, as well as two nights later, in the *Nutcracker pas de deux*, his grace of bearing, the lightness, the elegance in *effacé* positions, the entire absence of mannerism were wonderful to see again. He has not yet regained the complete control of arm poses in leaps that he had before, and had alone—where Eglevsky's style is one of forthright power, Youskewitch's is one of insinuating strength; and both are superb.

Ballet Theatre's novelties this season are Ashton's *Les Patineurs*, Keith Lester's *Pas de Quatre*, a new Berman investiture for *Giselle* and Robbin's first "serious" piece, a psychological drama for three characters called *Facsimile*, with a score by Bernstein and a set by Oliver Smith. The last, announced for October 17th, is naturally awaited here with intense interest. Of the other novelties, only *Les Patineurs* has so far been given, and it was at once a popular hit.

*Les Patineurs* was charmingly danced by the Company, with Kaye and Laing discreetly and convincingly romantic in the *pas de deux*, and Kriza very witty in the variations; and it looked in Cecil Beaton's decoration like the most graceful of correct Christmas cards. People agreed that the piece was fun, that it was easy and fresh in its plainness, and had a certain inconspicuous elegance of taste that keeps it from quite being musical comedy. Ballet lovers regretted that

(*Continued on page 25*)

# ITALIAN BALLET TODAY

*By* GEOFFREY HANDLEY-TAYLOR

THE ballet in Italy is an organic part of the opera, and during the last few years under the concentrated guidance of State-appointed directors, as opposed in former years to the direction of more or less private impresarios, the ballet has accomplished considerable success. Until the State took over the Royal Opera House Ballet there was no systematic evolution, and indeed it has taken several decades successfully to reorganise the ballet into a State group of dancers.

In the formation of the State-owned ballet, the dancers were assembled from existing private companies, later to be refreshed by a younger type of dancer drawn from the Opera House School of Ballet. With rare exception, the students must acquit themselves favourably for a period of eight years at this ballet school in the Blasis and Cecchetti systems before passing on to the Royal Opera House Ballet.

Since Maestro Tullio Serafin has taken charge of the artistic direction of the Opera House, and shared the musical direction with Oliviero de Fabritiis and Nino Stinco, the standard of production in the territory of ballet has been considerably raised.

The actual renaissance of the ballet in Italy on a great scale, however, did not commence until 1938. With the arrival in Rome of Aurel Milloss, Hungarian-born choreographer, and former *Maître de Ballet* at the Royal Opera House, Budapest, a new page was turned in the history of Italian Ballet. Upon his appointment as Director of Choreography to the Royal Opera House, Milloss found a fairly well prepared field, for the State Dance Academy, under the capable direction of Theresa Bataggi, was able to offer a large number of graduates to supplement the existing ballet ensemble.

It is only since Milloss directed the Royal Opera House Ballet that any epoch-making results have been achieved. As a choreographer he combines the dramatic and sensitive touch of Helpmann with the charm and slavish accuracy of Lichine. As an artist he shares the versatility of Attilia Radice (*prima ballerina assoluta* of the Opera House Ballet). His natural swagger on the stage is one of the highlights of discussion, but this swagger is as important to Milloss's performance as Gigli's sly smile is to the Opera.

In addition to presentations in the Opera House, this enthusiastic company has also performed in the open air at the Caracalla to as many as 20,000 spectators. This enormous amphitheatre of mellow red Roman brick provides an ideal setting for the interludes of ballet in *Faust*—a setting which no other land can boast. What could be more ideal for the scene where Mephi-

"LA GIARO" ("THE JAR")

"ROMANTIC HUNGARY", A FOUR-ACT BALLET BY AUREL MILLOSS

stopheles takes Faust to hell to sample the sensual delights than this relic of architectural splendour aglow in the fire of evening sun?

Some of the ballets included in the repertoire of the Opera House company include *L'Aprés Midi d'un Faune*, *La Boutique Fantasque*, *Turn the Lantern*, *Don Juan*, *Les Sylphides*, *Coppélia*, *Viennese Folly*, *Bolero*, *Petrouchka*, and the costuming and décors for these productions are the creations of Benois, Istvan Pekary, Mario Pompei, Veniero Colasanti, Alfredo Furiga and Giorgio di Chirico.

*La Giara*, a Milloss Ballet, offers a series of Sicilian folk-dances to the music of Alfredo Casella, while in order to cater for the dramatic talents of Attilia Radice, Milloss conceived a choreographical portrait of *Salome* in which the music of the famous "Seven Veil Dance" of Richard Strauss is utilised.

The spectacular rendering of *The Creatures of Prometheus* to the music of Beethoven is the ballet which has mostly enriched the accomplishment in Italy of Milloss. Unfortunately the choreography of Vigano has long been lost, but Milloss created a new choreography, using for his foundation the preserved clues of Vigano's salvaged libretto.

For sheer sparkle and exuberance, at the same time affording Milloss an opportunity of paying homage to the landscape which inspired the rhapsodies of Liszt, *Romantic Hungary* is a most acceptable production. Much authentic Hungarian national dancing is incorporated in this spirited work. This ballet is brilliantly costumed to the designs of Istvan Pekary, also a Hungarian. Typically 18th-century Hungarian in theme, the scene opens in a gypsy encampment and then shows how one of the vagabonds returns to a normal life by fulfilment of his longings to love. Act III moves rather slowly, far too much time being taken up with the abduction of a girl from her aristocratic home. The finale, a peasants' wedding celebration, however, fully compensates any weakness in Act III. In this act the vigorous Hungarian national dances play a most impressive part.

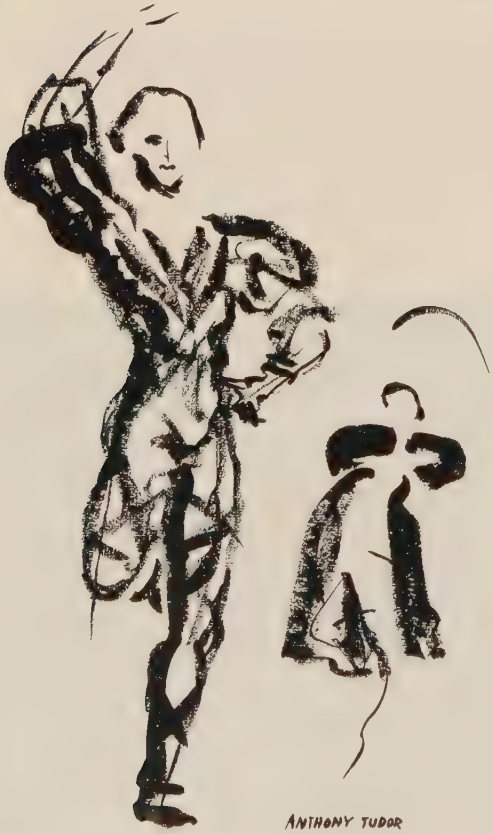
Though possessing neither the depth nor the maturity of Milloss, Ugo dell'Ara promises to be the future hope of Italian Ballet. His dancing is robust, accomplished and gymnastic, and in many ways his cavalier qualities and remarkable stage presence has a resemblance to the assets of Roland Petit of Les Ballets des Champs Elysées. dell'Ara is largely partnered by his sister, Lia, whose technical virtuosity makes up for other deficiencies.

One of the principal dancers of the Italian Ballet (the last Cecchetti scholar) is Attilia Radice, who from her position as *prima ballerina assoluta* of the Scala, Milan was brought to Rome at the invitation of the Opera House authorities. Her timing is remarkable, and like Milloss, she possesses vitality, dramatic force and extraordinary versatility.

Alberto Felici best known for his elevation and fantastic pin-point recovery, and his Spanish national dance interpretations, is extremely worthy of mention, as is his understudy, Giulio Perugini, whose *quatre tour en l'air* leaves one quite breathless.

(*Continued on page* 29)

ALICIA ALONZO
GISELLE I



ANTHONY TUDOR
ROMEO & JULIET

# OUR FIRST AM

*By* JOSS

*Sketches speciall*

BALLET THEATRE and London can congratulate themselves: Ballet Theatre on having come, danced and conquered; London on having proved once again its freedom from personal or national prejudices in art and its ability to recognise good work, whencesoever it may come.

Ballet Theatre had severe initial handicaps to overcome. The annual slaughter usual in the ranks of American *corps de ballet* (see *Ballet Today*, July, 1946) had duly occurred, so that out of thirty-nine dancers twelve were new. This led to the observance of the other ritual normal in American Ballet conditions whereby at the beginning of a new ballet year the entire repertory has to be learnt afresh by the entire company working from 9 a.m. to midnight, with a break between 6.45 p.m. and 9 p.m. for the public performance. In addition, two new conductors struggled with an unfamiliar orchestra which virtually sight-read the first performances of all ballets, while the dancers gradually accustomed themselves to the difficulties of an unfamiliar stage without the help of the self-confidence that comes from dancing before familiar audiences.

Only professional dancers can fully appreciate to what an astonishing display of virtuosity London was, in these circumstances, treated. British dancers, quite rightly, consider three performances a week of an Aurora or Giselle about as much as can reasonably be demanded of a dancer if she is to give her best; one records that Alicia Alonso rehearsed from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. before the first night of *Giselle*, and while doing four *Giselles* also danced four times the exacting *Apollo*, besides daily rehearsals, all in the same week.

Anyone capable of appreciating these handicaps feels it almost an impertinence to criticise; still, Ballet must be judged not by what goes on behind but by what is seen when the curtain is up.

Let us begin with some constructive fault-finding, the quicker to give later free rein to our enthusiasm for this fine company.

While with its new works Ballet Theatre successfully set its own standard, with *Giselle* it challenged comparison not only with the high level achieved by Sadler's Wells only a few days prior to Ballet Theatre's opening, but also with the great *Giselles* of the past remembered in London. As an ensemble, Sadler's Wells do *Giselle* better than Ballet Theatre, and as a production they leave Ballet Theatre far behind, while the music under Lambert's direction leaps from

# CAN VISITORS

NESSY

*Guy Sheppard*

charming adequacy to magic heights. When we come to the individual performances, the balance is still on the whole in Sadler's Wells' favour.

The trouble with Alonso's Giselle is that when Ballet Theatre three years ago sought a deputy to relieve Markova periodically, Alonso was a soloist of insufficient stature in the company to be able to insist on developing her own interpretation; Markova did Giselle "the right way" and so Alonso also had to do it that way. One does not, however, go to see Clunes' imitation of Gielgud's Hamlet but to see what solutions to the problems of Hamlet's character Clunes has to offer. Alonso is now of sufficient calibre to think out the role entirely afresh; she has the temperament and technical qualifications to offer interesting solutions of its problems. As pure dancing, her Act II is lovely.

The third handicap which Ballet Theatre suffer in *Giselle* (and in any other classical ballet) is their lack of training in mime. I have never heard of a mime class in the U.S.A., where mime is regarded as a few gestures that you pick up as you go along: but anyone who has attended Ursula Moreton's classes could tell the Americans that it is as difficult to mime as it is to do well anything else connected with ballet. Mime involves the same knowledge of rhythm as actual dancing; it affects the whole deportment of a company and is one of the marks by which one can tell a classical dancer; finally, the old classics lose their dramatic significance without it. Ballet Theatre's *Giselle* suffers from dancers who give the appearance not only when they are actually sketching in some mime, but by the way that they move about the stage in classical ballet, of never having attended mime classes.

*Graziana* was the honourable failure of the first work of a promising young choreographer, John Taras, but the proper place for *Three Virgins and the Devil* is in a revue. In this, and in *Tally Ho*, Agnes de Mille showed her essentially American outlook in thought and in movement, neither of which merge happily with European subjects, costumes and music. She has much original comic invention which would be more suitably employed in American subjects, such as *Rodeo* (another de Mille ballet, perfect of its kind, in the American Monte Carlo's repertory). *Tally Ho* burlesques the Versailles court, but de Mille has as much understanding and feeling for the subject as a British choreographer might be expected to have for a Texan rodeo; his efforts would probably set de Mille's teeth on edge

NORAH KAYE
IN STAGE

JOHN KRIZA
FANCY FREE

as much as her Versailles does mine—despite its several happy inventions.

*Petrouchka* had a box office success because it had not been seen here for eight years; it was a little more than adequately played, although the crowd with their characteristic American gestures never suggested St. Petersburg in 1830. It only came to real life with the grooms' and coachmen's dances, which were admirably done.

On the credit side we can hail with enthusiasm *Pillar of Fire*, *Fancy Free*, *Interplay*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Apollo*, *Watlz Academy* and the various *pas de deux*, with an honourable mention for *On Stage* as promising a new choreographer.

In *Fancy Free*, Robbins has put on a beautifully set and cleverly lit stage closely observed sketches of the toughness, sentimentality, touchiness and comradeship of three American sailors in and out of a bar on leave. The choreography suggests that the Americans can now rival the Russians as exponents of robust male character dancing (of an ease, freshness, and vigour too long absent from the London stage). Robbins' second ballet, *Interplay*, gay and once more cleverly lit, shows that he is widening his dance vocabulary, firmly based on classicism. Robbins is a man of culture and intelligence, and, providing he does not yield his soul to Broadway musicals, I see in him the makings of a choreographer of Massine's stature.

Tudor's *Pillar of Fire*, one of the greatest contributions to Ballet seen for many years, is superbly danced by Nora Kaye, perfectly suited to the leading role: Vaslavina, a delightful Ballet Theatre find, who succeeds in holding her own with memories of her predecessors in the role of the youngest sister; Lucia Chase who achieves great heights as the eldest sister; Hugh Laing and Tudor as the men.

On the basis of *Pillar of Fire*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lilac Garden*, *Undertow* and *Dim Lustre* (a lovely ballet yet to be seen here), it is clear that Tudor understands his medium, has a creative, artistic intelligence, and an original mind; Britain can be proud of her export to America. But since all his ballets call for the interpretation of character, I suggest that he deprives himself of the means of giving his story its fullest meaning by avoiding mime and by apparently believing that the intensity of his characters' inner feelings can be portrayed solely in movement below a stony face. I have always admired *Lilac Garden* for its choreography, but had never been moved by its drama until I saw it danced by Sally Gilmour, Celia Franca, Paltenghi and Bayston in the Ballet Rambert. While Ballet Theatre have always given me coldly perfect dancing in this, the Ballet Rambert used not only their bodily movements but the play of their physiognomies to portray their feelings—they aroused my interest in them as human beings in conflict; they made me suffer with them,

whereas the consistently blank expressions of the Americans compel one's attention on technique and do not touch the heart; if the heart is not to be touched, why bother to have a story? An abstract ballet dispenses with gesture frequently and with facial expression entirely; a story ballet cannot; a blank face, like a blank cheque, only becomes interesting when it is filled in.

But what splendid male dancing we saw. The ease, lightness and precision of the classical Eglevsky (who can also let off some pretty fireworks in Russian folk dancing) were superb. Kriza, now a fine all-round dancer, has the stuff of greatness in him if he is not killed by overwork. Fernando Alonso, Robbins, Kidd, Romanoff, Saddler and Solov stood out where all were above the average.

The many admirers whom Nora Kaye and Alicia Alonso have won will eagerly await them next year; neither need worry about technique, but both might give more thought to the dramatic side of their art; ballet includes mime.

Of the soloists, Fallis was superb in *Apollo*; her *Sylphides* waltz is lovely, but she needs to make her arms flow from one position to the next—at present they spoil a beautiful bodily movement. Eckl had bad luck in the failure of *Bluebeard*, since she had begun to dance Boulotte really well when the ballet was, through mistaken outside advice, taken off (*Bluebeard* was admittedly badly done in its first performances and created a wrong impression on many—though by no means all—balletomanes, but the cause was lack of rehearsal, the fatigue of overworked dancers, the conductor's lack of acquaintance with its requirements, and the orchestra's pardonable inability to sight-read a difficult score. Fokine's light-hearted masterpiece was never given a chance in London). Diana Adams needs softer arms, but has a beautiful line, a greatly improved technique, and when she has acquired experience and more self-confidence, could be an outstanding dancer; Vaslavina is a newly acquired treasure who should not be overworked but nursed into a ballerina.

Among a *corps de ballet* glistening with talent, I pick out Barbara Cole as a long term investment for a rise, and I award a special palm to Mary Heater as about the only member who can infuse a Russian spirit into the *Petrouchka* nurse maids' dance.

Lack of space must excuse (*a*) my frequent dogmatism where I would have wished to elaborate, and (*b*) some regrettable omissions. *Au revoir*, Ballet Theatre: London likes you.

*The Roger Wood action photograph on the cover is of the eight dancers in Jerome Robbins' "Interplay".*

HUGH LAING AND ALICIA ALONSO IN "UNDERTOW"

HUGH LAING AND NORA KAYE IN "ROMEO AND JULIET"

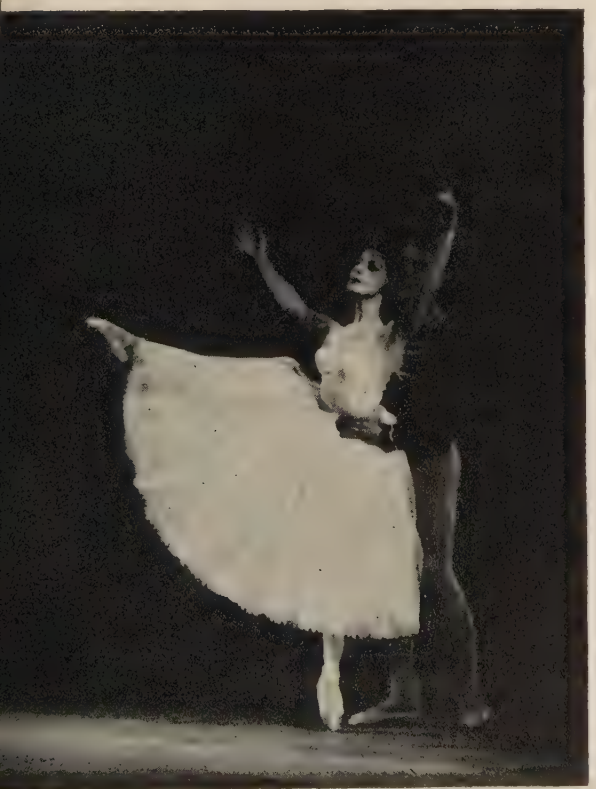
*Action photographs by Roger Wood*

ANTONY TUDOR AND NORA KAYE IN "PILLAR OF FIRE"

PAULA LLOYD AND JOHN KRIZA IN "FANCY FREE"

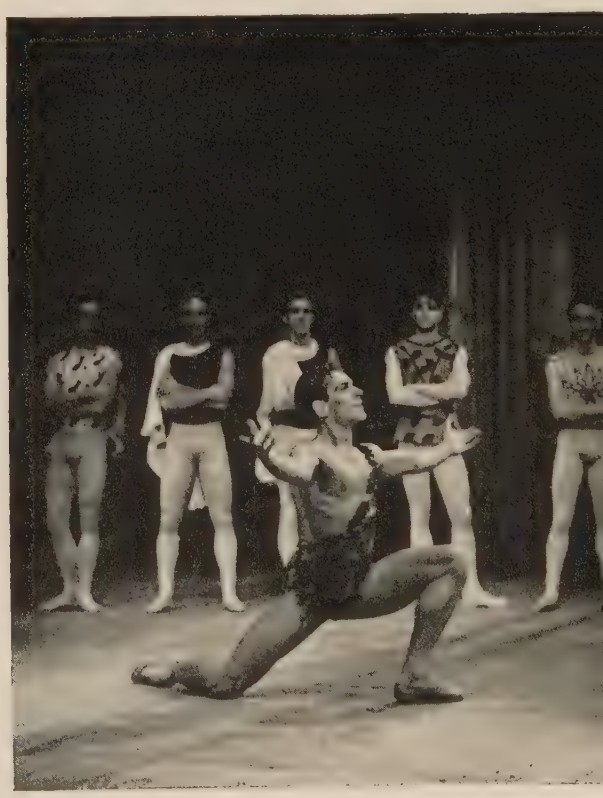
"ON STAGE", WITH MICHAEL KIDD AND ALICIA ALONSO IN FOREGROUND

*Action photographs by Roger Wood*



ICIA ALONSO AND ANDRÉ EGLEVSKY IN "GISELLE", ACT II





ANDRÉ EGLEVSKY IN "HELEN OF TROY"

# A NEW VIEWPOINT FOR BALLET

*By* F. B. WHITNEY

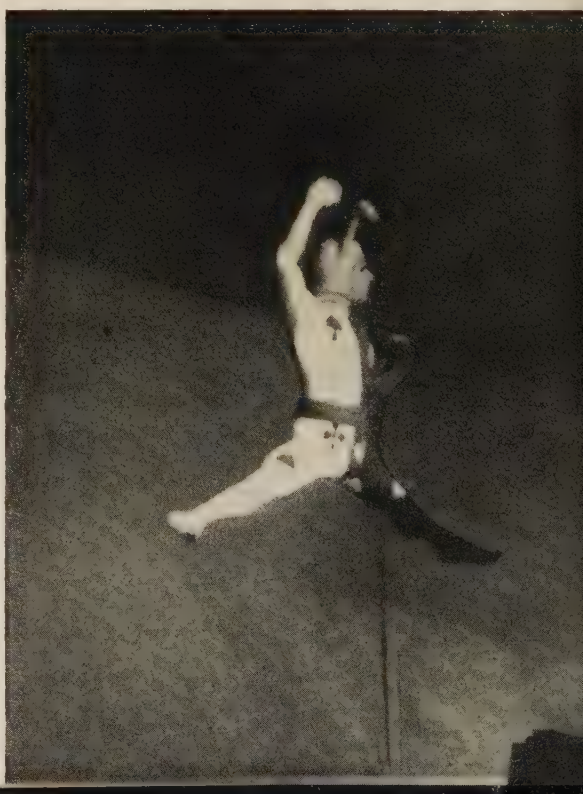
TO someone whose main ballet-going experience has been during the war years, the arrival of the first foreign company to visit London since 1939 was eagerly awaited. I had a few memories of the pre-war Russians, but in the main Ballet to me meant Sadler's Wells and, on a smaller scale, the Ballet Rambert. I was therefore eager to see a new company with a brand new repertoire and dancers, and to begin to form those standards of comparison essential to the complete enjoyment of ballet.

I had an immediate disappointment with the opening ballet of the first Champs-Elysées season—*Concert de Danses*—all technique but no artistry, and only redeemed by the most elegant of costumes. Then came *Jeu de Cartes*, with Jean Babilée, and from then on the evening became one of increased excitement. My first impression was of technique—difficult feats accomplished with startling ease and aplomb, but after the first lure of technique had worn off and I began to take for granted the ease of *pirouettes*, elevation, and *batterie*, the charm and innate artistry seeped through. I sensed that it was a different type of ballet from that to which I had been accustomed, although I did not make sweeping comparisons, as the Champs-Elysées were obviously a small company full of eager and gifted young dancers but with no ensemble. This at first worried me. Personally I do not care for isolated excerpts from a ballet by one or two dancers, but I thought they were wise at their present strength not to attempt the classics other than *Pas de deux* and variations.

It was in their own native repertoire that I liked them best. On the first night, in spite of Babilée's brilliant dancing in *Jeu de Cartes*, it was *Les Forains* which turned me into an ardent admirer of the company. Here, with the briefest of décors, was all the gaiety and pathos of a ragged gypsy performance. The music was just right, the dances imaginative and suited to the characters, and the whole possessed that unity of idea and construction which distinguishes a ballet from sheer divertissement. Later on another work, *Los Caprichos*, entirely different in style and approach, showed again this cohesion of theme, choreography, music, and décor. Also to see genuine Spanish dancing translated in terms of ballet proved a new and exciting experience, while the dancing of Ana Nevada and her expressive playing of the castanets gave me an evening of immense pleasure.

But the greatest revelation of all, and I think the greatest difference from our own Ballet, was their male dancers. Not only did they possess a technique far surpassing any I had witnessed previously, but they were more than mere virtuosi. Both Babilée and Petit were artists in the true sense. Their technique was never displayed as acrobatics, and, indeed, it was the apparent ease with which the most difficult feats were accomplished that made them so enjoyable to watch. Both were also excellent partners. Previously, to me great partnering meant Helpmann only, and I had come to regard it as a rare gift that I was not likely to see very often. Now not only was there accomplished and unselfish partnering from the two leading dancers, but competent partnering from all the other men. This same ease appeared among the Americans, where a good dramatic sense was combined with a virile technique, and in all the double work there was a feeling of strength and sureness. This greatly added to my enjoyment, having known what it was to sit on the

*Babilée's brilliant dancing in "Jeu de Cartes"*
*Action photograph by Peggy Delius*

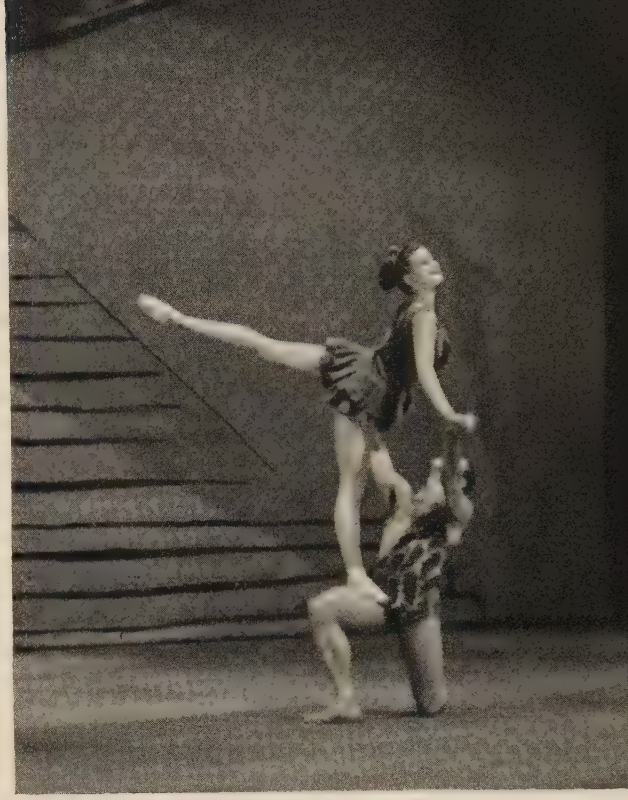


edge of my seat wishing for dear life that they would get the thing over before anything happened.

At times the French seemed undisciplined and the ensemble work was poor, but dancers are not robots; these were all very young, and there seemed nothing that experience would not improve. Also they possessed an indescribable magnetism which came across the footlights so easily. Again, to revert to my original point, although I passed through the stage of marvelling at the technique of the men, I never lost the thrill of watching it. This may seem unnecessary emphasis, but it was something new and rare for me. Conversely to the men, however, the female side of the company was very disappointing. Their leading *danseuse*, Solange Schwarz, was all technique and nothing else, while the dancer I like best, Irène Skorik, had personality and promise, but seemed rather immature to bear the onus of many leading roles. Here I think that English ballet has been very successful. Quite apart from Fonteyn, the Wells have always had many promising young soloists.

Behind the Champs-Elysées one could sense artistic direction. This seems to me a most important factor, having helped in no small measure to make the Wells so successful, and lack of which, in spite of possessing some of the finest dancers I have seen, made the New Monte Carlo Company a failure. Under this direction the Champs-Elysées exploited their advantages (most of the ballets contained better male than female roles) and minimised their defects. There was also revealed in Roland Petit a choreographer of great promise. In the style of choreography I noted another difference. The French dancers' main asset is their technique, and all their ballets seemed designed to show this to an advantage. Everything was conveyed in terms of pure dance. This was also true of the Ballet Theatre of New York and seems only natural as both possess a highly developed technique and both seem to know how to weld this into the substance of the ballet until it becomes an inseparable part of the choreographer's ideas. I am thinking particularly of the work of Petit and Jerome Robbins in this instance.

In English choreography the dramatic values seem to me as yet unrivalled, but apart from Ashton I feel that the more dramatic a work gets, the more the dance gets pushed in the background. I do not applaud virtuosity for its own sake, but I do feel that if pure dance can be incorporated within the framework of a ballet, however dramatic the action, the drama gains considerably. That is why *Giselle* has remained my favourite of all ballets, and its whole survival seems to me to be based on the fact that its story is expressed solely by the dance with a few passages of conventional mime. So, personally, I welcomed this concentration on pure dance from these two companies, and as both



*Action photograph by Peggy Delius*

*. . . ease of partnering . . .*

ANDRÉ EGLEVSKY AND DIANA ADAMS IN "HELEN OF TROY"

are in the early stages of their existence it will be interesting to see where this trend will lead. So much more can be conveyed if the choreographer can call on a large vocabulary. The first time I saw *Fancy Free* I felt here at last were plot and action realised by the most varied dance sequences. I am not violently against purely dramatic ballet relying as much on costume and scenic effects as on the dancing, but I feel that if this trend continues and dancers are not called upon for any great technical accomplishment, they will lose the impetus to acquire it. Also because there are fewer calls to display technique in contemporary English ballet (again Ashton excepted) the average English dancer lacks the *brio* and dazzle in presentation which the average American possesses. Conversely, I think that English *danseuses* possess a musical feeling in their dancing that I did not notice so much in the other companies. Only Skorik among the French showed it, although Ballet Theatre had Alonso, Adams, Hayden, and Fallis.

Fortunately there are still the classics, and here I think English ballet has been more successful to date than the others.

On first seeing the Ballet Theatre I felt more, and indeed was, on home ground. They were a large company with a *corps de ballet* and possessed a good technique, although at times there was a tendency for it to become rather mechanical. But most enjoyable of all was the great sense of humour and delight in what they did that possessed them all. This humour and above all, to use an American expression, their "pep", and seemingly inexhaustible vitality left me breathless. Sad to say, these very qualities seemed to spoil their classics, turning them into displays of virtuosity, and ruined their *Sylphides* especially. The steps were well danced, but all the poetry and atmosphere vanished. Only Alonso at times caught the right mood. Their two ballerinas showed a marked difference in style. Nora Kaye was a brilliant technician and an accomplished mime, but her dancing had a hard quality about it so that all the time I was conscious of the difficulties. Alicia Alonso, a lyrical dancer, possessed a first-class technique, but it was never displayed as such. On the other hand, her range was limited owing to her lack of powers as a mime. She was at her best in a pure dancing role, as in *Apollo* or *Graziana*, and I thought her one of the best female Blue Birds I had ever seen. She also created a lovely portrait of the Shy Girl in *On Stage*. On the other hand, her Giselle—eagerly awaited after the glowing American accounts—proved very disappointing. She was restrained to the point of ineffectiveness, and it was not until Act II that her dancing began to show itself. In this ballet, too, the company seemed to lose all its life. The dullest of décors, peculiarly played and scored music, neither Giselle nor Albrecht (Eglevsky) possessing any great dramatic talent, all this helped to produce what I would call the company's one real flop. Perhaps this seemed more noticeable to one accustomed to the perfection of Fonteyn's Giselle, and I feel that so far, in neither of the visiting companies, have I seen a dancer to match her in her infinite range and dancing that can be hard and glittering, or soft and lyrical, as the role demands. Only Chauviré of the Monte Carlo comes into the same class.

Like the Champs-Elysées, it was in their own native repertoire that the Americans appealed most to me. Here they took classicism and added to it their own national flavour. The result was one of the most enjoyable ballets I have ever seen—*Fancy Free*. Jerome Robbins seems to me a typically American choreographer. His other ballet, *Interplay*, was also similar to *Fancy Free* in the originality and inventiveness of the steps, but this time it was plotless with just a slight competitive theme holding it together.

To sum up, my main reaction to these visitors was one of immense pleasure. I saw male technique such as I had only read about before; I enjoyed the comedy of the Americans very much. Hearty laughter is rare enough in ballet, and they gave me this in full measure; I liked their blend of classical and modern, and hope that one day they will be able to present classical ballets in a classical manner; I was impressed by the *chic* sets and costumes of the French, and finally I added the names of Petit, Babilée, Alonso, Kriza, Eglevsky, Robbins, Kidd, and many others, to the list of dancers whose future work will always be of great interest to me.

Lastly, all this has made me appreciate more clearly the achievements of our own English Ballet. That they have reached their present status during six years of war, with all its handicaps, is a matter for praise indeed. I think the visiting companies must have been of as much value to the dancers as to the audiences, and perhaps may lead to more concentration on better technique for the male dancers as soon as conditions permit.

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*Below.*—An Edward Mandinian back-stage photograph of Nathalie Philippart and Jean Babilée, who are again in this country dancing with Les Ballets des Champs Elysées. Babilée and Philippart were married at the conclusion of the first London season of this Company.

Les Ballets des Champs Elysées are shortly off to Switzerland, but are returning for another London season in March.

*Photograph by Angus McBean*

ONA INGLESBY AS COTYTTO, "GODDESS OF NOCTURNAL SPORT", IN "THE MASQUE OF COMUS"

## INTERNATIONAL BALLET

THE International Ballet season at the Coliseum during September, which augured so well with the new production of *Comus* in its original masque form, the addition of some French dancers from Egorova's Paris studio, and the great teacher herself in residence as ballet mistress, was singularly disappointing.

The production of *Comus* had the creditable intention of illustrating in actual performance the early stirrings of the art of Ballet by reviving the masque exactly as it was done at Ludlow Castle in 1634. To achieve this effect, however, some observance of the circumstances conditioning that first production is required, and modernisation and expansion should proceed only so far as is necessary for translation to a large professional theatre. Ballet has grown so tremendously since it broke away from the itinerant players, the court and the masque to achieve self-sufficiency, that it is now incredibly difficult to relegate it artificially to that earlier subservience. In the Tudor and Jacobean masques, dance formed an integral part of the entertainment which helped the performance along (and at times, one suspects, revived flagging attention), whereas in this reconstruction, dance (technically of a very different order) seems clapped on as an over-weight which, if anything, impedes the action. Milton's lovely verse sits ill upon the force of declamation needed to carry it throughout a large theatre and, robbed of its intrinsic aural beauty, nothing remains, for dramatically the whole of *Comus* makes only one point (the inviolability of true chastity), albeit it makes it about five hundred times. One ventures to suggest that the intention might have been better rewarded by the choice of an earlier masque of richly allegorical subject which would have permitted greater theatrical aggrandisement than does Puritan Milton's verse-morality.

The rest of the International repertoire remains purely balletic and mostly classical, still reflecting the wartime scarcity of good dancers. A first move towards the company's hope of becoming truly "International" in both personnel and repertoire has been made with the engagement of several young French dancers from the Paris schools, but there is as yet no noticeable effect upon performances. The direst need of the company is a powerful choreographer who could exploit the dancers' individual abilities, particularly those of Mona Inglesby who has undeniable, although not at present anything like fully utilised, gifts. The classical productions are almost all overweighted decoratively, while *Aurora's Wedding* (remarkably simplified) is quite beyond the capabilities of the company: only Algeranoff's performance as the Chinaman recalled the *real Aurora's Wedding*.

Among the newcomers, Michel de Lutry shows promise as both dancer and mime, although his technique is at present patchy and he is not ready for the great classical *pas de deux*. Desta Marno and Menen Smeta have strong personalities and considerable technique.

It was good to see Claudie Algeranova dancing again, while Jack Spurgeon deserves praise for careful partnering and some really good lifting. Domini Callaghan (terribly overworked) is charming in the right role.

A lamentable characteristic of the season was the manner in which the orchestra subordinated *tempi* to the dancers' whims, thus effectively ruining the musical performance. MARY CLARKE.

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(*Continued from page* 13)

Ballet Theatre had not brought back a more ambitious work of Ashton's, the English choreographer many of us are particularly curious about. Ballet Theatre's season would certainly seem more brilliant had it done so. It was a great pity to have missed so fair an opportunity, and one hopes Ashton will soon come over and rehearse works of his with both Ballet Theatre and the Monte Carlo.

# THE SPECTRE OF THE ROSE

## *A film problem unsolved*

I CANNOT pretend to have been able to watch this film with the open mind of a cinema- as opposed to ballet-goer, and it may very well be that the former will welcome it as a novel departure from the usual routine of back-stage films. As a balletomane I was constantly irritated by the insistence on greatness where none existed and, above all, shocked by the taste which gave the film a title which can only have been used for its "cashing-in" value.

Ben Hecht, writer, producer and director, deserves credit for setting out to make an adult film about the theatre. Unfortunately he chose an aspect which has landed him into a number of pitfalls which he would have avoided had he been on his own home ground. His justification for making the film must surely have been a dual one—that of bringing ballet to the cinema for the first time in a way which would help to create a new audience from a non-ballet public, and of showing ballet lovers that this art could be equally satisfying in another medium. But filmgoers will be neither more nor less interested (or, alternatively, bored) by dancing whose merits they will not be in a position to judge (though I would give a guess that some of it will strike them as being howlingly funny), and at the same time balletomanes will certainly be infuriated by the singularly puerile efforts which are hailed throughout as masterpieces of balletic art.

I began to fear the worst when the insane hero, after an eight months' non-stop loll on his bed, suddenly announces his intention of working again, protests that he is not in the least out of practice as he has been doing it in his head all this time, and proceeds to kick off a pair of shoes which would have been the very ticket for such practice, after which he leaps wildly in the air in several directions at once *with bare feet*. This dancer, to whom everyone in the film keeps referring as the greatest genius since Nijinsky, has a technique which apparently consists solely of the aforesaid leaps, *entrechats* which shake him from the waist down (from the waist up he remains rigid in any position), some rather sketchy *tours en l'air*, and no *ballon* at all. He is supposed to have killed his first wife in a fit of madness during a performance of *Spectre of the Rose*, a lapse which he explains by saying that "the music does things to him", and after this exhibition of barefooted agility, at which impresario, ex-ballerina and present ballet-mistress, suspicious detective and potential second wife, are all practically rolling on the floor in ecstasies, a great come-back is planned for him and no one will be surprised to hear that *The Spectre of the Rose* is the chosen *pièce de résistance* to prove, no doubt, that the killing was the sort of accident that might happen to almost anybody. In order that no susceptibilities should be offended (!) the choreography, décor and music have been entirely altered (and what that music did to the dancer is nothing to what it did to me), and the young girl now goes to her satin-covered couch in a bedroom roughly the size of the Albert Hall, accompanied by some wilis left over from *Giselle*. The spectre then dashes in through the window in an un-customary suit of solemn black, and nobody cares in the least that he has, just beforehand, taken a poke at the heroine with a very nasty looking dagger.

The effect of all this is that he ultimately goes off his head again, only this time it is his own death he encompasses by leaping through an upper window of his hotel. This last scene when the dancer, his mind finally shattered, springs madly round the small room, dashing his body against the walls and furniture in a frenzy of claustrophobic terror, has genuine power and excitement.

Ivan Kirov acts the dancer adequately and will probably convince all but the balletomanes that he is the superb dancer he is supposed to be; his physique at any rate can be admired unreservedly. Viola Essen has the wistful, heart-shaped face with large dark eyes that we associate with a *danseuse*, but there is nothing in the choreography which allows her to show ballerina quality.

Some of the characterisations, notably that of the impresario, whose one virtue is his artistic conscience, and of the bitter-tongued poet who hurts where he loves, are right out of the Hollywood rut, as is a great deal of the dialogue, though there are a few lapses where I could only hope I was not hearing aright. But where the film finally falls down is in the whole conception of the dance, and as this is the principal reason for the film having been made at all, it must be accounted a failure. Had Hecht called in Balanchine, who has had considerable film experience, to take over that side completely, the result might well have been truly notable.

P.W.M.

# *Balletomane's Bookshelf*

CONTEMPORARY BALLET. By Audrey Williamson. (Rockcliff, 21s. net.)

It has been told of Nijinsky that after the first Paris performance of his version of *L'Après Midi d'un Faune* he was approached by an elderly gentleman who warmly embraced him and with tears in his voice declared that the full significance of Mallarmé's immortal poem had at last been revealed. The eminent dancer, as is well known, had been proffered artistic culture in such bulk by Diaghilev that he had been unable to swallow and much less to digest it. In consequence his reaction to his new admirer's enthusiasm was such as to suggest entire ignorance both of the author of *La Musique et les Lettres* and of his enigmatic masterpiece. There prevailed, therefore, as on the occasion of Mallarmé's visit to London, a "*brouillard monumental*," and what must surely have been the most devastating anti-climax in the annals of the arts.

Miss Audrey Williamson has an evident ambition to be erudite. She appears to have swallowed culture in hearty gulps, but her digestive apparatus has failed to perform its function of absorbing such very abundant helpings. She seems sometimes to know what she is talking about, but there must be many occasions on which the reader will not. One is confronted with such curious expressions as "the softer and more extended Russian School . . ." "The liability to degenerate" is followed by "this degeneracy". There is an occasional hint of that species of intoxication which supervenes upon a too-exuberant verbosity. Lack of space forbids quotation. *Miracle in the Gorbals* is described as a "comment" on slum conditions, and *Adam Zero* as "more timeless" than the former work. We are informed that "a choreographer or dancer can have a meticulous accuracy of metre without seeming really musical". So can an author. As usual with books about Ballet, references to music, when they occur at all, are difficult of comprehension. Bach is credited with the creation of an "Air on the G string". The mention of Delius' "bitter-sweet wood-wind *motif*" leaves us wondering whether the bassoon and the piccolo are jointly concerned in this combination. There is the same appearance of uncertainty in a reference to the drama. ". . . by Clement Scott's conception of playwrighting (*sic*) Ibsen's *Ghosts* was not a social drama but a number of unpleasant things, not unconnected with the sewerage system . . ." Does this refer to Scott's general preference for stopped-up drains or is it a derangement of dramatic epitaphs? *An Enemy of the People* has a much closer connection with the sewerage system.

(*Continued overleaf*)

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The book contains a number of errors of fact. The choreography of *Casse Noisette* was the work of Ivanov and not of his superior officer, Petipa, who had "reported sick". *Billy the Kid* is apparently attributed to Agnes de Mille instead of Eugene Loring. "Spessivitseva" is twice perpetrated. Despite these blemishes there are passages of real value in this volume, among them a vehement protest against those who, having themselves an insufficient musical sensibility, are wont to belittle the function of music in Ballet. Miss Williamson undeniably possesses the faculty which she mis-terms "catholicism of taste". It is a pity that her expressions of opinion should be so marred by twistings of her mother-tongue. M. MONTAGU-NATHAN.

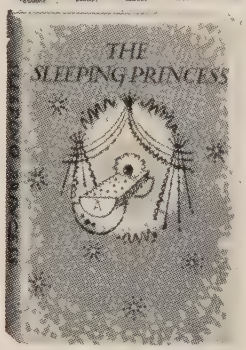
SIXTEEN YEARS OF BALLET RAMBERT. By Lionel Bradley. (Hinrichsen Edition Ltd., 15s. net.)

The author claims for this book no more than that it is an appreciation of the Ballet Rambert and an annotated record of ballets and dancers since its inception as the first company to present English dancers in an English repertoire. His own warm enthusiasm, however, will be shared by all those who remember those early seasons at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, and by all the innumerable friends this company has made since. The index of ballets and dancers makes up a formidable list of achievements and speaks plainly of the debt our Ballet owes to Madame Rambert, one of its doughtiest pioneers, though many will wish there had been a little more paper available to allow for a rather more extended text. The pictures are of particular interest, in that they show in many cases the original casts alongside the latest photographs of the dancers who are now associated with the same roles. Such comparisons, far from being odious, are of a kind to delight the hearts of all lovers of ballet. And the decorations by Hugh Stevenson are in themselves an enchantment.

P.W.M.

THE MAKING OF A DANCER. By Arnold Haskell. (A. & C. Black Ltd., 8s. 6d. net.)

This is the somewhat misleading title of a book which gives in permanent form the gist of the lectures delivered by Arnold Haskell to Discussion Groups, Ballet Clubs, etc., all over the country. These lectures deal with all the various aspects of ballet and are preceded by an account of the work done in the past by the Royal Academy of Dancing and its plans for the future. This section is an eye-opener into the conditions under which teachers of dancing in this country are still permitted to function. The final section gives Mr. Haskell's replies to a representative number of questions which have been put to him at

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such lectures. I should very much like to see this idea expanded to cover the many other relevant questions which must have been asked, with Mr. Haskell giving more extended answers than could obviously be done extempore in the limited time available. Perhaps I have given him an idea for yet another book (?). One word in Mr. Haskell's ear: it was Jasinsky, not Woizikovsky, who danced Fate in the practice-costume performance of *Les Présages*. P.W.M.

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(*Continued from page 15*)

These principals, together with ten other star artists, head a company of sixty-two female and male members, whose numbers are from time to time increased to a group of one hundred and twenty dancers where necessity demands.

Taking into consideration the unusual difficulties of the war years, particularly during the German occupation, and the fact that for many months ballets demanding the use of full "points" were out of the question, due to lack of shoes, the productions of the ballet in Italy, both in quantity and quality, will rank high in the esteem of those fortunate enough to witness them.

Perhaps, when equipment becomes more plentiful, and the younger men of the ballet are not affected by the calling-up, under age group, for the Italian Army, even more remarkable will be the achievements of the Ballet than in the last eight years.

The future of the ballet in Italy from a choreographical and directional viewpoint would, however, appear to depend upon Aurel Milloss, for he is the master mind behind the dance renaissance in that country.

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